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6. Class and Race

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56 IT WAS the colonial sugar-cane plantation system which gave the Recôncavo many of its characteristic traditions, and which formed patterns of class and race or color relations which have persisted in the region in a modified form. More than [167] three million Negroes were imported from Africa during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, and a large proportion of them were brought to northeastern Brazil. The Portuguese plantation owners became rich and formed a regional aristocracy which led a luxurious and ostentatious way of life. The slaves and their masters formed two distinct social groups. As the colony developed, intermediate groups came into existence. As early as 1549 there existed a small independent group of people, composed of Europeans and mestiços, for many Europeans who came to the colony did not receive land grants. They were merchants, soldiers, or priests in the colony, gente pequena (small people), free but without the social and political influence of the landowners. The mestiços date back to the times when Portuguese ships first began to touch the coast of Brazil, even before colonization began. A notable example is Caramurú, a Portuguese sailor who was stranded on the shore of what is now Bahia and who had a large mestiço family by the time the city of Salvador was founded in 1549.[1]

The early period of colonization is crucial to an understanding of the Brazilian class complex of today, since ap-

1. See Thales de Azevedo, Povoamento da cidade do Salvador, (Bahia, 1949), pp. 57 ff.

parently the criteria for class distinctions were evolved and "set" at that time. The white Portuguese males, and the few Portuguese women present, were the owners of the land and of the people, both Indian and Negro, who were drawn into the cultural milieu which became Brazilian society. They were the group who set up and presented the ideal behavior patterns to the others. They were at the peak of the status and prestige hierarchy, while the slave was at the bottom. Thus was established the original dichotomy of the whites as upper-class and the colored people as lower-class. As colonial development continued, other factors were added to this basic one by the will of the whites. For it was the white group which was primarily responsible for the creation of the mestiço, and it was the white who placed this new mestiço socially between himself and the darkest colored person.

It is clear that color distinctions arose along with the creation of the multishaded mestiço group, and that at the same time other factors were brought into being, qualifying that of color, such as education, family, and occupation. White masters who had children by dark slaves often raised them as legitimate if they were light-skinned, that is, if the difference between father and child was not too great. In such a case the child could become a member of the upper end of the social hierarchy, with education, family, and a position in which he could command others rather than do any manual labor. This was particularly the case when the white master did not have a legitimate, European wife to bear him children. If the difference between father and offspring was too great for the child to be easily acceptable as the son of a European, the child was nevertheless not infrequently partially recognized and helped by the father in some fashion. He then took his place among the gente pequena, free but illegitimate and rather dark-skinned. With marked Negroid features his status was even lower than the European gente pequena. An illegitimate child who proved to be clearly Negroid was likely to be left in bondage with its mother. Thus, early in Brazilian society the degree of skin darkness and the kind of facial features and hair form became important. Opportunity for personal advancement was linked with similarity to the white European, who was the giver of status and who liked to give higher status to those in his image.

Until 1888 there were two major social categories: slaves and nonslaves. Within the nonslave group, however, there

4: Pierson Z-4, 5 (1935-1937) 1967
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accurate to say that there is discrimination in Brazil on the basis of family origin, financial condition, educational achievement, personal characteristics—*and color?*

It nevertheless is true that the indelible character of color makes it somewhat different from the other criteria of rank. Always visible, it automatically and inevitably carries over into any situation of improved status. It cannot be hidden in new contacts nor entirely forgotten in the old, as readily occurs to a former condition of poverty, a former lack of education, or formerly immature or otherwise inadequate personal characteristics. Even relationship to a low-status family can be put "out of sight" to some extent merely by moving to a new community where one's family origin is unknown; or, if known, often imperfectly so.

That none of these former marks of low status continue to cling in the same way as color to the individual who has risen in rank in one of the reasons for some of the confusion regarding the precise character of the Brazilian "racial" situation. Some observers point out the undoubted opportunities of rising in rank, *in spite of color*; while others stress the difficulties in the way—difficulties not only of a colored person rising in rank at all but also with reference to the after-effects, sociologically, in his group relations (Florestan Fernandes 1955; 1964), and psychologically, as far as his inner life is concerned (Bastide 1943b), especially if he be a particularly sensitive or perhaps a pathological individual, as the poet Cruz e Sousa may have been.[16]

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Moreover, it is more difficult for a colored woman to rise in rank than for a colored man, because one more criteri[illegible] status is thus brought into play, namely, female sex; fo[illegible] traditionally in Brazil male sex has been valorized and female

[16] See Emiliano Pernetta, p. 3, *apud Ianni* (1962:264).

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sex depreciated, although this situation, in more recent years and especially in the cities, is changing.

That we are not dealing with merely racial phenomena, then, is borne out by the thousands of persons scattered across the colored continuum, of at least partial and sometimes of considerable African descent, who have escaped socially (and openly) into the branco category and been accepted by brancos;[17] and that we are also dealing with a class, rather than with a color phenomenon alone, is borne out, first of all, by the fact that the discrimination[18] which all observers note—and which some think either constitutes or reflects prejudice—virtually does not exist among the *lower* class, but tends to appear only as one proceeds up the class scale.[19] In Brazil, as Bastide has pointed out with reference to São Paulo, to see a race problem among members of the lower class would be absurd. "In the poorer sections of the city," Bastide (1955:137) has written, "where the brancos live in promiscuity with blacks, any prejudice would be ridiculous." Frazier (1944:266) also recognized this absence of discrimination in the lower class; and that was our conclusion at Cruz das Almas (cf. 1951:190 ff.).

[17] If it be suggested that many light-colored persons also escape into the white group in the United States, the difference is that, in every case, this is not known to the whites; and, if it does become known later, the individual will automatically be put back into the "Negro" category, a possibility which, in Brazil, would everywhere be considered absurd, as Freyre long ago pointed out.

[18] It should of course be clear that we are using "discrimination" here only as defined above, and that we do not imply that persons in the lower class are unaware of physical differences.

[19] Although it may be possible to find an occasional branco among the lower-status groups who shows some measure of withdrawal from colored persons, and who even may speak disapprovingly of them, he will in all likelihood turn out to be a person with an ambitious desire to rise in rank, who holds similar attitudes toward all "pobres" (the lower-class poor), regardless of color (cf. Virginia Bicudo 1955:270).

4; Pierson Z-4, 5 (1935-1937) 1967
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a nation more Caucasian in physical appearance." In addition, one should further note, as Willems has also suggested to us, that an aspect of this policy has become to some extent more formal and articulate in recent years. As we have defined it, this informal and unstated policy reflects a desire to absorb all minority groups—whether immigrant[40] or of color; but discrimination on the basis of either color or race obviously can stand in the way of its realization. It is with reference to this obstacle that Willems believes the policy has become more articulate, as reflected in the law of 1951, which gives legal negative sanction to discrimination in any form, a law passed overwhelmingly by the Brazilian Congress. It is reflected also in the committee reports and discussions inside and outside Congress which accompanied the enactment of this law; in the decidedly vocal and positive opposition on the part of Brazilian organs of public opinion to the occasional evidences of color discrimination upon which public attention becomes focused; and even, as Willems also points out, in the anti-racist militancy of colored organizations in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

Although the basic facts seem to have been observed and reported in the original study, not all were given, perhaps, the relative prominence they deserved in the hypotheses which terminated it. One might add to these hypotheses certain apparent facts to which attention is called, to some extent at least, in the course of this book:

1. A large number of popular terms have arisen which seem to designate the various racial combinations in the population. However, a) these terms are descriptive not so much of racial descent as (1) of the actual physical appearance of the individual in question, and (2) of his social

[40] Cf., in this respect, Nogueira 1955:552; Pierson 1951:191.

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rank; b) they may vary with the person employing them, and with the same person at different times and under different circumstances, and especially with the status of the individual being referred to and with the relation of the speaker to him.

2. Caucasian physical traits possess prestige and also disproportionate aesthetic value among all social ranks and colors,[41] although the local "somatic norm-image," in the phrase of Hoetink (1961), is considerably "darker" than that in the United States, as is borne out, for instance, in attitudes toward the *morena* (see pp. 136–38).

3. The rise in rank of colored persons, a) occurs primarily by reason of demonstrated personal or occupational competence, educational achievement, the accumulation of financial resources, or fortuituous circumstance; b) is sometimes aided by brancos who are linked by parental, godparent or other bonds of sentiment to the individual in question (cf. pp. 353 ff.); and c) is accomplished by individuals *as individuals*, so that conflict on the basis of either color or class is relatively subdued (cf. Thales de Azevedo 1955a:195).

4. In their attempts to rise in rank, persons of color are handicapped by the fact that color has long been identified in Brazil with a slave condition and hence became, long ago, a criterion of rank. This is the role of dark color logically to be expected, given the history of slavery in Brazil and the Americas, where slaves for centuries were blacks taken from Africa by Europeans and their descendants, who possessed a more advanced technology, to labor on their plantations and

[41] With the possible exception of a few colored intellectuals, particularly in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, who deliberately seek to valorize "negritude" (blackness), although their attitudes in this respect seem to be rather ambivalent.

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in their placer mines. However, had this "historic accident" been of reverse character, that is, had Africa at the time of the discovery and early exploitation of the Americas itself possessed technological superiority, and had Africans and their descendants then discovered America and taken to work on *their* plantations European slaves from a Europe of less advanced technological development, dark color—and not white—would today, in all likelihood, carry prestige. Being white would then probably be a decided disadvantage, a definite handicap, since long ago white color would have become a criterion of inferior rank; and whites would then want to be black and to have children blacker than themselves.

5. However, the restraining influence of color in Brazil today, a) varies inversely with its intensity (as do all the other criteria of rank); b) is not the determining criterion, as in South Africa or the United States, but only one of a series of conditioning circumstances, similar (as far as most persons are concerned) to those with reference to age, sex, lack of personal competence, lack of skills, lack of financial resources, or lack of education; c) varies with the individual and with circumstance; d) may change permanently during an individual's lifetime; e) may be less significant than some observers have thought; and f) may be tending to decrease, as more individuals demonstrate their ability to overbalance the restraining influence of color by the accumulation of other criteria of rank (provided, of course, that changes now under way in the economic and sociological structures do not alter this trend).

6. Although cases of discrimination involving colored persons undoubtedly occur, they are not necessarily due exclusively to color. In any given case, the circumstances are com-

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CHAPTER VI

THE RISE OF THE MIXED-BLOOD

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EARLY in the colonial period race mixture resulted in an intermediate population group in more favorable position for social advancement. Mulatto slaves, because they were ordinarily chosen by their masters and mistresses for the more delicate and exacting household tasks, to be *mucamas* (maids), *amas de crear* ("mammies"), and other *pessoal de casa* (house servants), early developed into a distinct group apart from the field hands.[1] They were baptized, received the master's name, and often were married in accordance with the prescribed legal and religious practices, thus establishing legitimate families and adding to the social security of their offspring by building up a family tradition.

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Many *mulatinhos*, illegitimate children of the *senhor*, learned to read and to write even more quickly than white, legitimate children, outstripping them in preparatory and even advanced studies. The Reconcavo of Bahia yields a number of such cases.[2] Particularly fortunate, we are told, were the children of priests. Their fathers, being ordinarily from upper-class families and possessing money and prestige, transmitted to their offspring, colored as well as white, ad-

[1] F. J. Oliveira Vianna, *Evolução do povo brasileiro* (2d ed.; São Paulo, 1933), p. 157; Jean Baptiste de Lacerda, "The *Metis*, or Half-breeds of Brazil," in *Papers on Inter-racial Problems*, ed. G. Spiller (London, 1911), p. 379.

[2] Gilberto Freyre, *Casa grande e senzala* (2d ed.; Rio, 1936), pp. 324–25. The author throughout this chapter is greatly indebted to Freyre's *Sobrados e mucambos* (São Paulo, 1936), esp. chap. vii.

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vantages of ancestry, social position, intellectuality, and wealth. The professions were readily open to them, and "marriages into the bosom of the most exclusive families"[3] sometimes took place. "More fortunate even than the son of a priest" and "A child of a priest is never unhappy" are expressions still heard at Bahia.[4]

Significant also was the widespread system of *creação*, whereby colored children who were being reared within the master's house, the so-called *crias*, *irmãos de creação*, *malungos*, *muleques de estimação*, gained position as "persons of the house," somewhat comparable to poor relations in the households of medieval Europe. Often they were seated at the patriarchal table as if members of the family. Some even rode in the family vehicle with their masters.

Owing to the peculiar personal associations in which the mulattoes grew up, they tended to develop certain traits favorable to their advancement. They were usually more intelligent, we are told, more aggressive, more dexterous, and more cunning than the pure blacks. Consequently, they were often assigned to the more skilled occupations, such as shoemaking, carpentry, and tailoring, where they developed occupational skills symbolic of greater personal worth than ordinarily attaches to unskilled labor.

Because they were liberated in preference to the blacks, the mixed-bloods, early in the colonial period, began to enter the free classes.[5] The disproportion between black

[3] Freyre, *Casa grande e senzala*, p. 324.

[4] "The social ascension of children of priests, both white and light mixed-blood, has always occurred with great facility" (*ibid.*, pp. 323–24).

[5] In addition, the king of Portugal in 1773 intervened in their behalf, denouncing those persons "so lacking in the sentiments of humanity and of religion" that they still keep in slavery persons "whiter than they are" (Freyre, *Sobrados e mucambos*, p. 327).

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under the happiest circumstances, the individual feels himself constrained only by those obligations which he freely accepts or imposes upon himself.

It is characteristic of such a moral order that it is nonrational. That means that it is not devised to protect any special interest, to serve any policy, and has no ulterior purposes of any sort. On the contrary, it arises in response to the natural claims which one individual makes upon another, as soon as he recognizes that other individual as human like himself.[10]

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Manumission, as we have seen, extensively occurred from the first. And final emancipation came about as the culmination of a widespread liberation movement which had for years dominated the public mind. The Brazilian Negro was thus released from a servile status gradually and under circumstances which favored the continuance of intimate personal ties. Final emancipation was not, as in the United States, brought about as an incident of civil strife, and the race relations which had normally grown up under slavery were never exacerbated by a program of reconstruction imposed from without by armed conquest. The rise of the black and of the mixed-blood in Brazil has always had in its favor those sentiments and personal attachments which primary relations tend to develop.

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In Bahia there is probably little or no race prejudice in the sense in which that term is used in the United States. There are no castes based on race; there are only classes. This does not mean that there is nothing which might be properly called prejudice but that such prejudice as does exist is *class* rather than *caste* prejudice. It is the kind of prejudice which exists *inside* the ranks of the Negro in the United States, the amount and intensity of which is actually very great.

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That race prejudice has not arisen in Brazil is perhaps due

[10] Park, Introduction to Bertram W. Doyle, *The Etiquette of Race Relations in the South* (Chicago, 1937), pp. xiv–xv.

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her, even in her dreams, and she dreaded worse terrors to come. Depressed by the helplessness of herself and her friends, of the whole South, it was not strange that she often remembered during these days the words which Tony Fontaine had spoken so passionately:

"By God, Scarlett, it isn't to be borne! And it won't be borne!"[11]

Brazilian society nowhere passed through a comparable period of social upheaval in which a threatened reversal of the status structure elicited such deep-seated fear and apprehension that generations later it is so vividly recalled by the descendants of those who lived through it. The rape of white women by colored men, either real or fancied, has been unknown in Brazil. There has not been anything remotely comparable to the conquest of our South by northern armies, the imposition, for years, of onerous political control from without, and the consequent development of feelings of resentment and bitterness which, lacking normal expression (by reason of the North's formidable power), in the form of effective aggression toward the actual offending object, became displaced upon the more or less helpless Negro when northern force was withdrawn. On the contrary, the relations between the races in Brazil have always been, to a considerable extent, intimate and cordial. The moral order of the Bahian *engenhos*, which, as we have seen, was organized largely on a familial and personal basis, has persisted relatively undisturbed down to the present day, and the members of the different races have, by way of personal feelings and sentiments, long identified themselves with each other, entered into each other's personal experiences, and come to appreciate their common human character. Instead of conceiving the Negro as an abstract object, the Bahian white tends to think of him as João or Maria and as being wholly human like himself.

[11] Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind* (New York, 1938), pp. 652–57.